

# Jamaican Economy Panel

A partnership between United Nations Jamaica and the Department of Economics at The University of the West Indies (UWI) Mona



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THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES  
MONA CAMPUS

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## Stigma, discrimination, and violence against vulnerable and marginalised groups in Jamaica



A number of local and global reports have highlighted the challenges faced by vulnerable and marginalised communities in Jamaica and across the region, with regards to stigma, discrimination and various forms of violence.

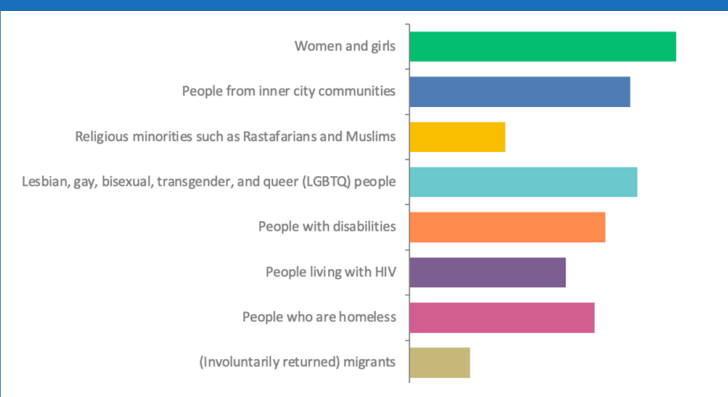
### Discrimination and violence in Jamaica

For most of the members of the Jamaican Economy Panel (JEP) stigma, discrimination, and violence perpetrated against vulnerable and marginalised communities are important concerns in Jamaica and a possible hindrance to fully achieving the SDGs. When asked how commonplace discrimination and violence are in Jamaica, 33% of members expressed that discrimination and violence are very prevalent, and 42% said that they are somewhat prevalent. The majority of panel members agree that discrimination and various forms of violence affect mostly women and girls, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people and people from inner-city communities.

**There is still stigmatisation in inner cities mainly against persons who are of a different sexual orientation or even violence against women and girls.**

**JEP PANELLIST**

#### Which vulnerable and marginalised groups in Jamaica do you think are affected most by discrimination and various forms of violence?



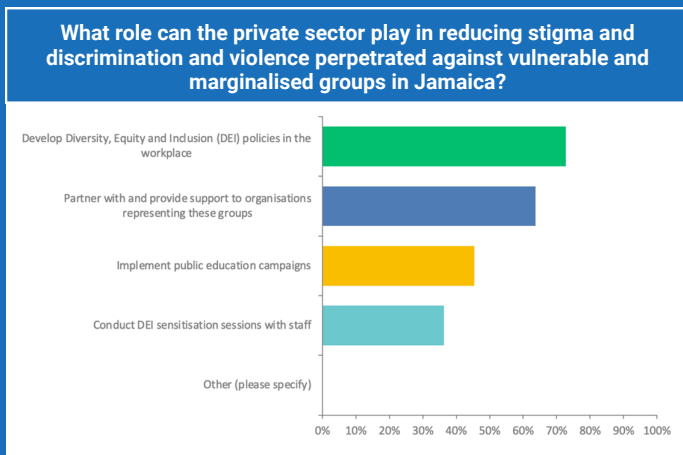
A myriad of sociocultural, religious, legislative and other factors often influence people's attitudes toward vulnerable and marginalised groups. Using the example of the COVID-19 pandemic in Jamaica, one JEP panellist articulated that "there [i]s huge stigma against people with diseases that have negative connotations." HIV was cited as an example.

On the heels of the May 17th International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia 2022, the JEP also considered the impact of discrimination and violence on LGBTQ people as part of this month's discussions. The majority of panellists expressed that a person's livelihood and well-being were more likely to be affected by forms of stigma and discrimination that included physical abuse, closely followed by the denial of employment opportunities, as well as displacement and homelessness. The majority of panellists believe that all societal sectors could do more to reduce discrimination and violence against marginalised groups, including LGBTQ people.

## Multistakeholder leadership is needed to end discrimination and violence

When asked what could be done to protect marginalised groups from discrimination and violence, a majority of panellists expressed favour for a multisectoral response which would include the strengthening of anti-discriminatory laws and policies, increased community based-interventions and safer housing and shelter for people experiencing displacement and homelessness. A significant number of panellists also felt that school curricula should integrate human rights principles and non-discrimination.

The JEP was asked about the role of the private sector regarding marginalised and discriminated groups, there was a high preference towards the recommendation for the private sector to develop diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies in the workplace to help reduce stigma, discrimination, and violence. The JEP also favoured private sector input in partnering and supporting organisations representing marginalised groups and implementing public education campaigns.



“Stigma and discrimination and other forms of human rights abuses including gender-based violence, are the greatest barriers to effectively address the HIV epidemic especially among key populations. Ending punitive laws and policies helps to break down barriers which prevents at-risk and vulnerable people from getting lifesaving HIV services. Ending inequalities is the pathway for ending AIDS as a public health threat.” Richard Amenya, Director, UNAIDS Multicountry Office based in Jamaica, said.

“As we saw in early COVID, there was huge stigma against people with [illnesses] that have negative connotations (HIV being the key example). Other marginalised groups, such as urban youths and rural communities also suffer from similar challenges.”

JEP PANELLIST

## Conclusion

Jamaica has made progress in addressing stigma, discrimination, and violence against vulnerable and marginalised communities. However, the efforts must be doubled to ensure that the structural drivers of exclusion are tackled through protective legislation, greater political will, effective human rights programming and monitoring as well as improved capacity of public and private sector organisations to promote, respond and treat issues of human rights.

Jamaica is party to several treaties and resolutions relating to human rights, which obligate the government to protect and promote the rights of all persons without distinction. Jamaica has made notable progress with the the establishment of the Office of the Children’s Advocate (OCA), Independent Commission of Investigations (INDECOM), and Office of the Public Defender (OPD), as well as the promulgation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights & Freedoms, the Sexual Harassment Act, the Child Care & Protection Act, and the Disabilities Act. However, continued work is needed to improve the human rights situation for vulnerable and marginalised groups.

Additional and accelerated efforts are needed in Jamaica to address stigma and discrimination in order to ensure that everyone, regardless of their group, can live peacefully with dignity and rights, participate fully in governance, cultural life and the economy, while achieving their fullest potential.